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MCO

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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119

14 November 1967

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[redacted]

Information as of 1600
14 November 1967

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HIGHLIGHTS

Port conditions at Haiphong are deteriorating, but North Vietnam's essential needs are being met.

I. Military Situation in South Vietnam: Fourteen encounters were reported in the Quang Nam - Quang Tin border area late on 13 November involving units of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division (Paras. 1-4). Communist military action against US forces in the western highlands continues (Paras. 5-11). [redacted] 3.3(h)(2)
Province indicates that enemy forces there have been receiving large numbers of replacements from North Vietnam (Paras. 12-15). The Communists may have moved 140-mm. rockets into northern Phuoc Long Province--the first such deployment in III Corps (Paras. 16-18).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

[redacted] 3.3(h)(2)

A newly formed "Committee Campaigning to Unite Buddhism" held a rather inconclusive meeting on 12 November in an attempt to resolve the charter dispute (Paras. 5-7).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: Truck traffic in the Laos panhandle has resumed (Paras. 1-4).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

[redacted]

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V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi has belatedly announced that the Soviets honored Ho Chi Minh with the Order of Lenin (Paras. 1-2).

VI. Other Major Developments: Port conditions at Haiphong are deteriorating, but North Vietnam's essential needs are being met (Paras. 1-7).

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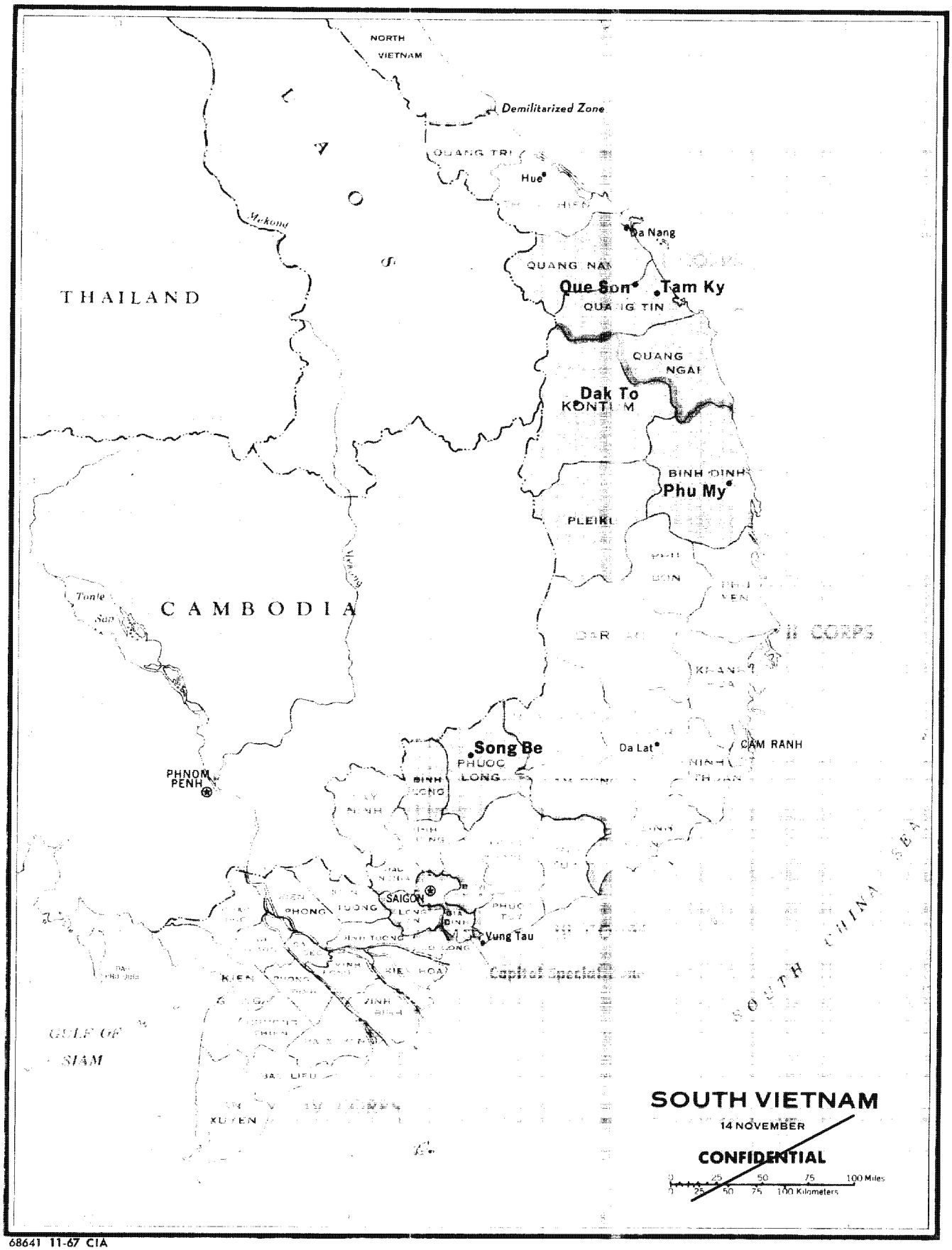

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Widespread, scattered engagements were reported on 13-14 November.

2. During a nine-hour period on 13 November, US forces in the border area some 18 miles northwest of Tam Ky reported 14 separate clashes. The enemy forces involved, tentatively identified as elements of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division, lost at least 18 killed.

3. Two of the 2nd Division's subordinate regiments--the 3rd and the 21st--together with the division's headquarters unit are apparently moving away from their present operating area. These units are known to have had heavy losses as a result of US operations, and it is probable that these regiments are breaking down into smaller units and attempting to move to the mountainous areas to the west.

4. The present location of the 2nd Division Headquarters some 10 miles southwest of Que Son places it near the location of the 1st Viet Cong Regiment, the third subordinate regiment of the division. The 1st Regiment has probably recently received some replacements and it has not engaged in a major action in the last month.

Activity in the Western Highlands

5. Elements of the B-3 Front--the highest Communist command in the western highlands of II Corps--continue to initiate military action in the Dak To area of southwestern Kontum Province. Three separate clashes were reported late on 13 November.

6. The first engagement was a mortar attack, probably by an element of the North Vietnamese 66th Regiment, on an American artillery fire support base some ten miles southwest of Dak To. In the second incident, just a mile to the northeast, 45 rounds were directed at an American command post. US casualties were light.

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7. The third incident occurred some 14 miles southwest of Dak To when an army patrol engaged an unknown-size enemy force. Nine Americans were killed, 21 wounded, and six are missing.

8. An undated note captured last week in an area some 14 miles west of Dak To provides additional information on the 1967-1968 winter-spring campaign of the B-3 Front. The document indicates that many large-scale, coordinated, offensive operations are to be conducted in order "to destroy" large allied forces. These ambitious plans purportedly are to be carried out on an "urgent and continuous basis."

9. The document included four major objectives to be achieved during the campaign. These include the annihilation of a major American element in order to force the Americans to deploy large numbers of additional troops to the western highlands, and the destruction of as many South Vietnamese troops as possible. Another goal emphasized the need to improve the technique of concentrated and large-scale attacks which would ultimately "liberate" an important area and strengthen the B-3 Front base area.

10. The fourth goal is to coordinate the campaign in the western highlands with other major battle areas throughout South Vietnam. Attempts to achieve this goal are suggested by the recent large-scale enemy activity in northern Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces to the south.

11. The winter-spring campaign plans also stressed the need to overcome supply difficulties in order to carry out attacks in areas far from Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army base areas. The captured paper also mentioned the need for such redeployments as the recent northward movement of B-3 Front units from Pleiku Province to Kontum.

North Vietnamese Replacements in Binh Dinh

12. [redacted] 3.3(h)(2)

[redacted] unit has been receiving large numbers of replacements from North Vietnam.

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13. [redacted] left North Vietnam with a 585-man infiltration group in early April and arrived at the headquarters of the 2nd VC Regiment in southern Quang Ngai Province in August. He said that 434 men survived the march. The remainder were lost to illness and desertion. He further claimed that two additional replacement groups, each consisting of 400-500 men, were scheduled to reinforce the 2nd Regiment this fall. [redacted] indicate that two infiltration groups entered South Vietnam in late August or early September en route to North Vietnam's 3rd Division. 3.3(h)(2) 3.3(h)(2)

14. Although these reports have not been confirmed, they are consistent with the long-term Communist objective of maintaining an active threat in the heavily populated, rice-producing provinces along South Vietnam's central coast. [redacted] 3.3(h)(2)

15. Very little large-scale fighting has occurred in Binh Dinh in recent weeks as enemy forces have attempted to procure a share of the fall rice harvest. If replacements are coming into this region on the scale reported, a step-up in enemy activity can be expected during the forthcoming "winter-spring" season campaign.

Large Rockets Possibly Deployed into III Corps

16. An enemy base camp estimated to be large enough to support two Communist battalions has been discovered some five miles south of Song Be in northern Phuoc Long Province by an airborne observer. Foxholes, trench lines, and numerous crew-served weapons' positions were sighted. Just to the north of the camp a large object mounted on a wooden platform was seen.

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17. The description of the object suggests that it may be a 140-mm. rocket launcher, which is normally mounted on a board. Although there are no known instances of 140-mm. rockets previously being used in South Vietnam's III Corps, their introduction is a possibility. The proximity of the area to major enemy infiltration routes from North Vietnam could facilitate introduction of the weapon and the remoteness of this area would make detection difficult.

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Buddhist Reconciliation Efforts

5. A mixed group of Buddhists and politicians, calling themselves the "Committee Campaigning to Unite Buddhism," met on 12 November to seek a resolution of the current charter dispute. Although representatives of both the militant and the moderate factions were present, the meeting apparently did not have the blessing of either Tri Quang or Tam Chau. This may, in fact, signal the beginning of the "third force" reported to be emerging as a middle-of-the-road grouping intended to work for the unity of the church without reference to the extreme views of either leader.

6. Some 30 people from various Buddhist sects and organizations were present at the meeting, along with acting lower house chairman Nguyen Ba Luong and Senator Trinh Quang Qui of the Farmer-Worker-Soldier slate. Thich Huyen Minh was the chief representative of the moderate faction and Thich Phap Sieu appeared to be the militants' sole delegate. Both Minh and Sieu spoke at some length on the charter problem, each professing his desire--and the desire of his faction--for unity. Minh, moreover, expressed the hope that the meeting's participants would work to convene a Buddhist congress which would examine both charters and decide on the retention of one. The others present, however, seemed unsure of exactly

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what they should do--whether to establish a formal organization to supersede both Tri Quang's and Tam Chau's factions, convene a Buddhist congress, or merely initiate informal contact between the two factions.

7. The meeting ended on that inconclusive note, but a group of six "representatives of Buddhist organizations"--not including, significantly, the one militant representative, Phap Sieu--remained behind to draft a declaration. The declaration was also rather inconclusive, pledging only to "promote the creation of an association to unite Buddhism." The association, which would include "many" Buddhist sects, would have a permanent office and a board of directors rather than a single leader. The declaration further calls for a congress, apparently to consider specifics of the proposed association.

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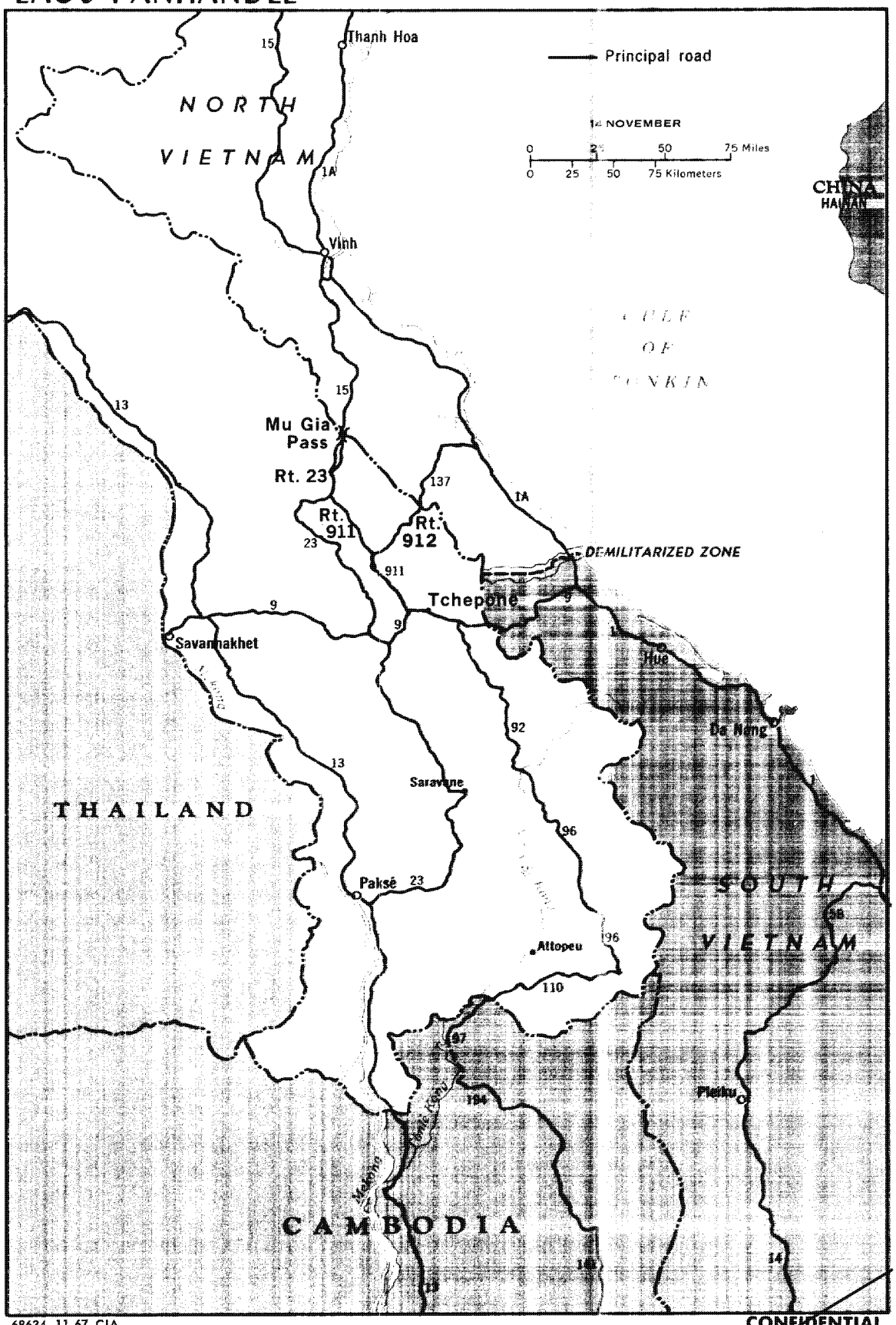
LAOS PANHANDLE



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[redacted]

III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Supplies are again moving through the Laos panhandle in support of the Communists in South Vietnam.

2. Reports from Route 23 south of the Mu Gia Pass indicate that about 120 trucks, or 11 a day, moved south between 1 and 11 November. Some of the trucks carried rice. On Route 911 the daily average came to seven southbound trucks during the first week in November. Stockpiling has probably been under way in the pass area since September and aerial observers claim that during late October over 300 trucks were operating on Route 912--the second route from North Vietnam into Laos. Thus far there has been no indication of increased truck traffic in the southern panhandle.

[redacted] 3.3(h)(2)

4. [redacted] indicate 3.3(h)(2)
that during September large quantities of supplies--mostly rice--were shipped from Cambodia via the Tonle River to Communist forces in southern Laos. The shipments were apparently halted for a time in October when supplies failed to arrive at the Cambodian transshipment point for delivery to Laos.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. After a delay of almost two weeks, Hanoi has acknowledged that the Soviet Union awarded the Order of Lenin to President Ho Chi Minh. A broadcast on 14 November reported that Ho sent a message of thanks to the Soviets for such a high honor. Ho, however, requested that presentation of the order be postponed indefinitely until "our people have driven off the US imperialist aggressors."

2. During the Soviet anniversary celebrations in Hanoi, the North Vietnamese had ample opportunity to publicize Ho's award. Their failure to do so at that time is an indication that the 77-year-old leader may have been too ill to receive the award publicly and that the regime decided to avoid mention of it. Acknowledgement of the award may, in fact, have been prompted by an article of 12 November by a Western journalist who was in Hanoi during the anniversary celebrations and who reported the absence of comment on the award. The same journalist also wrote that Ho was "very weak" and was confined to bed when the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi came to invite him to the anniversary celebrations in Moscow.

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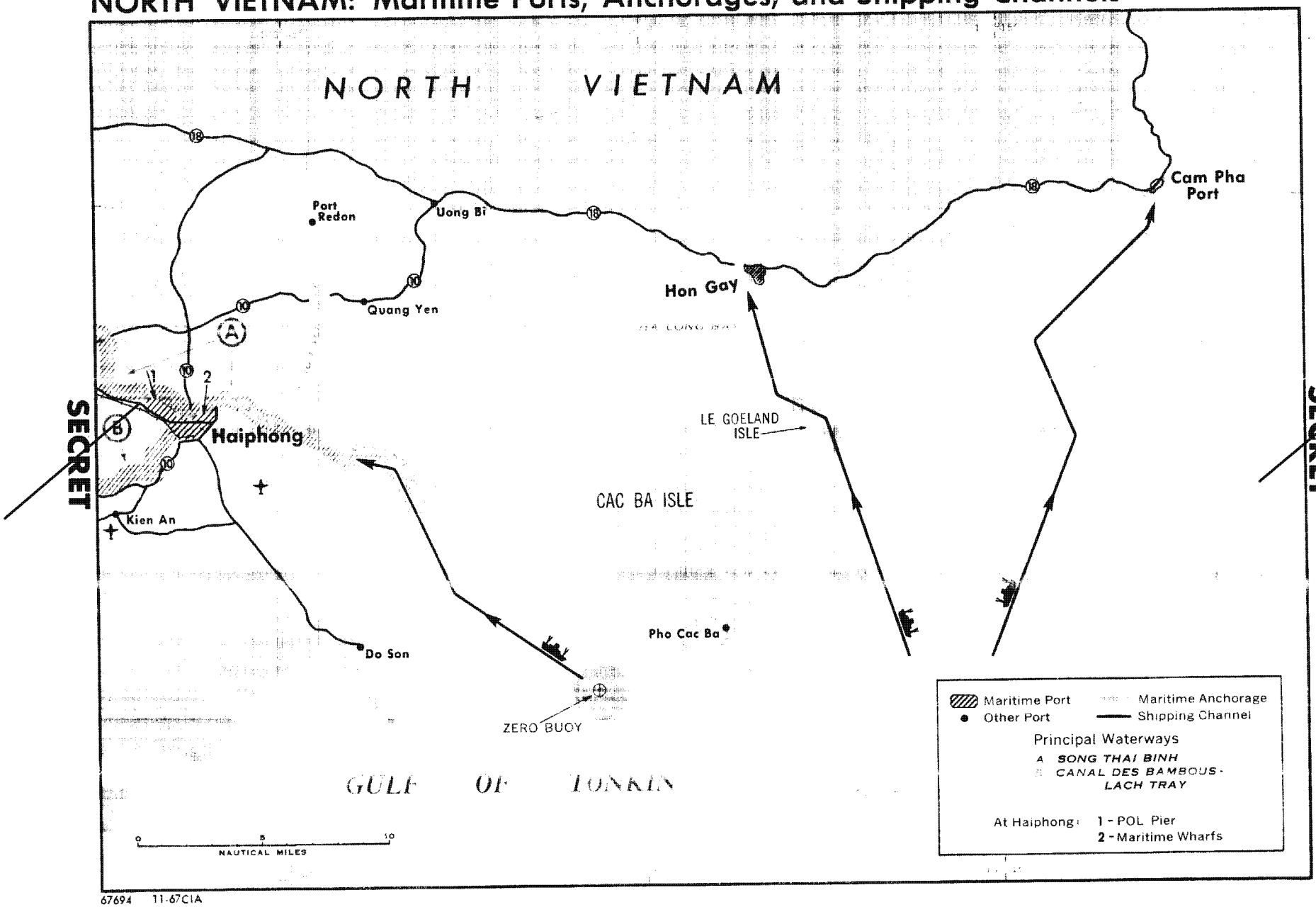
NORTH VIETNAM: Maritime Ports, Anchorages, and Shipping Channels



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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. North Vietnam's port operations continue to be hampered by cargo handling difficulties. Essential needs are being met, however, and in recent months port congestion has been somewhat eased.

2. In the first half of 1967 imports by sea reached a record high of about 128,000 tons per month. Imports at this pace placed heavy demands on port facilities, particularly at Haiphong. As cargo backlogs stacked up on the docks, ships had to wait longer and longer to unload. By August the turnaround time for ships in North Vietnamese ports was averaging more than 30 days.

3. Since that time, imports by sea have been cut back considerably. The total for October was about 90,000 tons. This has helped to ease port congestion and has reduced the average turnaround time for ships visiting North Vietnam in October to 19 days. Turnaround time is still higher, however, than in 1966 when the average was only 13 days.

4. Silting in the main channel into Haiphong is getting to be a problem. It has meant that most ships must now enter the harbor at high tide. Ships drawing 26 feet of water have been forced to wait ten days or more for the high tide of the month before entering. Recent reports indicate that the average load per ship is being reduced--possibly to permit entry to the harbor at any high tide. In some cases small Soviet ships carrying flour have been diverted to Hon Gai, a port normally used for the export of coal, in order to relieve the overcrowded conditions at Haiphong.

5. Damage to key bridges at Haiphong has slowed the movement of goods out of the port area. Increased use is being made of pontoon bridges, ferries, and inland waterways, and this has minimized the impact on the transport system. Frequent air raid alerts in Haiphong, both real and practice, are reported to cut substantially into working time.

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6. Despite these problems, North Vietnam continues to import essential nonmilitary goods by sea. Bulk foodstuffs accounted for over 65 percent of imports in October. Petroleum accounted for another 13 percent. Hanoi should be able to maintain this level of imports despite the growing problems in handling cargo.

7. Instead of using Haiphong, incoming ships could anchor in the many island anchorages in the Gulf of Tonkin and unload cargo into barges. This has been done in the past by tankers. Barges are vulnerable to air attacks so Hanoi would adopt this course only as a last resort.

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